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AUTHOR Franklin, Godfrey; Heath, Inez A.
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ABSTRACT

This essay discusses multicultural education in the context of responding to an article in a national magazine, which critiqued multicultural education. This essay argues that the article, "School Daze" (Louis Menand) in "Harper's Bazaar" magazine in September, 1992, oversimplifies and misrepresents key issues of multicultural education and its benefits to U.S. society. An opening section reviews the various meanings of multiculturalism as it has been used recently and attempts to formulate a more precise definition of the term. This discussion offers seven key functions of multicultural education--to: (1) provide students with a sense of self; (2) help students understand the totality of the experiences of ethnic and cultural groups in the United States; (3) help students understand the conflict between ideals and realities; (4) explore ethnic and cultural alternatives; (5) develop decision making, social participation, and citizenship skills in students; (6) study various cultures, historical experiences, and social realities; and (7) achieve full literacy among students in at least two languages. In addition, the paper responds to several specific points in the Harper's article by arguing that multicultural education focuses on diversity among groups, that there is no majority culture throughout the United States, and that the "melting-pot" notion is not accurate for today's society. Contains 21 references. (JB)

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School Haze: A Response to Louis Menand"s View on Multicultural Education

Godfrey Franklin, Ph. D. and Inez A. Heath, Ph. D.

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> *"A team that has no prejudice has no limits. The strongest team, the strongest business, the strongest country, is one where there is freedom to be yourself without inequality or prejudice. We have seen prejudice hurt all those who participate in it. And we've seen togetherness and equality give power and joy."* (Xerox Corporation, 1988, p. 24).

Louis Menand writes: "The multicultural movement in public education, (like its counterpart in the university) is... an effort to preserve vanishing cultural identities in a country in which people are more and more alike, and their culture is more and more mixed" (p. 404).

We believe that multicultural education is about the study of how humans have existed and contributed to a culture. Salient to the discussion of this topic is the need to clearly define multicultural studies, especially in the context of public schools and its relevance to the future of our nation's public educational system which is tantamount to our economic survival. If we are to expand our frontiers, we must first be involved in understanding the histories, languages, and cultures of the people who have been an integral part in the development and growth of our nation. To understand and appreciate other societies should not be looked upon

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as a political issue, but rather as a question of our ability to act as leaders in working toward an interdependent global economy which is one of the primary expectations of the multicultural education curriculum. Ladsen-Billings (1992) contends that "multiculturalism promises that through diversity we will not allow democracy to fall victim to conformity" (p. 310).

Recently President George Bush, coined the phrase, "The New World Order." Different people interpret this phrase differently depending on their vantage point. However, we, as educators, especially multicultural educators, would like to understand the phrase "the new world order" to mean that we, the people of these United States of America, are dedicated to working towards a world where there is only one race: the human race. The human race that comes in different colors, shapes, cultures, ethnic, socio-economics, and religious groups, genders and exceptionalities - the human race that is multicultural.

Those who are resolved towards making multicultural education a political issue, are doing a great disservice to our nation in maintaining our place as a world leader. The military has led in this effort after its rude awakening during World War I. Never was this more evident than during the Vietnam War. Educators who are working in various levels and settings in public schools, realize the need for competent policy makers who have a well developed knowledge base in multiculturalism as it pertains to the schools for which the curriculum is being developed, and from which our future leaders will come.

The question of how multicultural education should be implemented varies with respect to grade level and level of understanding by the student. The focus in the early grades should be on living in a diverse world in which all share the responsibility of working toward a better world, and learning of the many cultures involved in our country's development. In the higher grades, multicultural studies should focus on the history and culture of all groups. Of relevance is the need for minorities to understand their culture within the majority culture. That is: Native Americans, African Americans, Asian Americans, and women, must be able to explore and examine their history in order to understand the significance of their cultural heritage as it relates to the historical, political and economic events that have taken place in our nation. This approach would help to bring about a sense of identity and dignity among the various cultural groups in our nation. The study of all minority groups should be part of everyone's education, as all people are historically connected in some way with each of these cultures. The richness of our American heritage is the result of the combined efforts along with varied cultural influences that have contributed to our becoming a distinctive and resourceful nation.

Evans (1991) writes that: "The United States has always been a multicultural society. Our heritage is rooted in the integration of our diverse nationalities and ethnic groups... a diversity that became a trademark of the American lifestyle (p. 5).

Multiculturalism encompasses cultural traditions, including sociological and psychological factors which are evident within a society. It is an integral part of the social science curriculum. At the elementary and secondary level, multicultural education must be relevant, pertinent, and above all, it should follow a developmental approach aimed at helping students understand others within their society who although may be different, but also share many things in common.

The term pluralism/multiculturalism does not imply that we are becoming more and more alike, as Menand believes. It connotes that there are many distinct groups of people, who can function together and are unified in their efforts toward a common goal. Multicultural education, at present, has made us aware of the commonalities and differences within our society and within our world. Different cultures have served to enhance and encourage the growth and development of our nation and the human race. To this end, the study of multiculturalism as it pertains to our becoming more cognizant of our ability to interact and communicate as a world power is the real issue with which multicultural education is concerned.

It is easy to understand the frustrations of educational policy makers because their views have become clouded or "hazed" by theorists and critics who only present half truths. It is, therefore, important that the positions be made clear and well defined in terms of the subject at hand. Consequently, our purpose is to propose a functional definition of multiculturalism in terms of how

it can benefit our nation through education. The first question then is, what is multicultural education?

According to some educators, writers, scholars, and critics, multiculturalism aims to toss out what it sees as Eurocentricism in education and replace it with "othercentricisms" which will lead us toward national fragmentation. Dinesh D'Souza, the author of "Illiberal Education: The Politics of Race and Sex on Campus", is quoted in Fechter, (1991) to have said that "Students are graduating knowing less today because there is less emphasis on classic western literature." D'Souza sees multiculturalism as replacing the old intolerance with a new intolerance by a newly empowered group he calls a "victim's revolution" (p. 25).

Professor of Religious Studies, Dr. Jacob Neusner of The University of South Florida (1991), discredits the multicultural education issues by saying that: "These sorts of things are usually pushed by a small band of activists with their own special agenda" (p. 37). Dr. Neusner agrees that the world is diverse, but he sees women's studies and Black studies as just "a cover up for a lot of racial cheerleading and black racism" (p.37). Kelsey (1965) defines racism as "a dogma which states that hope of civilization depends upon eliminating some races and keeping others pure. It is the dogma that one race has carried progress throughout human history and can alone ensure future progress" (p. 29). Such statements have provided ammunition for the racists who are looking for ways to point fingers at minority groups in an attempt to oversimplify issues that are extremely complex. To make matters

worse, multiculturalism has been denounced in media as the new McCarthyism, the new fundamentalism, the new totalitarianism, (Time, April 8, 1991). This only serves to confuse the issues and to turn an intellectual educational issue into an emotional and political issue: an issue that is often presented in a simplistic manner which omits important aspects. If we are to discuss the value of any curriculum reforms within our American public educational system, we must first clear the "haze" that has obscured the facts.

Defining Realistic Goals in Multicultural Education

Recognizing the complexity of developing a curriculum in multicultural studies which can satisfy national interests, the National Council for the Social Studies developed a set of guidelines entitled "Curriculum Guidelines for Multicultural Education" (1992) which includes twenty-three areas that are specific to the development of a multicultural curriculum. These guidelines help to provide support for our arguments against Menand's views. Of specific relevance to Menand's article are the following guidelines:

1. To provide students with a sense of self;
2. To help students to understand the totality of the experiences of ethnic and cultural groups in the United States;
3. To help students to understand that a conflict between ideals and realities always exists in human societies;

4. To explore and clarify ethnic and cultural alternatives and options in the United States;
5. To help students to develop their decision making abilities, social participation skills and sense of political efficacy as necessary bases for effective citizenship in a pluralistic democratic nation;
6. To include the continuous study of the cultures, historical experiences, social realities, and existential conditions of ethnic and cultural groups including a variety of racial compositions;
7. To provide opportunities for students to study ethnic group languages as legitimate communication systems and help them develop full literacy in at least two languages (NCSS Task Force, 1992, p. 277-288).

Multicultural education, therefore, is not an education aimed at replacing one culture with others. It is not dropping a course, for example, American history and filling its place with African-American or Asian-American (minority-American) history. Although we have dropped Greek and Latin language requirements at universities years ago without any earth-shaking consequences, some critics may still consider it to be an educational coup de tat.

Multiculturalism in actuality is aimed at ending the cultural domination which limits the power of the people of the majority and the minority cultures. So those of us, engaged in the education of our youngsters, for the next century believe that a multicultural education requirement ought to be part of a student's education.

Because it is going to be impossible to live in the world of the future without a mutual understanding of issues that relate to race, gender and cultural differences.

In his article, "School Daze", Louis Menand makes several points which are worthy of discussion:

Point 1: Menand argues that multiculturalism is a word having two distinct inflections. His statement oversimplifies the real matter. Multiculturalism focuses on diversity among groups. This diversity is defined by Banks (1988) and Gollnick and Chin (1990) to include age, gender, religion, socio-economic status, exceptionality, as well as cultural, linguistic and racial identity. Thus, multiculturalism in its truest definition as it relates to education in our public schools, represents a variety of inflections, and not just two as Menand suggests. The questions asked by multicultural educators do not typically revolve around whether Native Americans came first, but rather, what is the history of Native Americans? Who are they in our society today, and how can their values continue to be part of our complex society? And perhaps of greater consequence, what can we learn from their culture that will make us a better nation in the future?

Another important aspect of multicultural education is to provide children the opportunity to reflect on how groups are perceived in terms of social and historical developments especially as distinct functioning units within our complex society today: a society that is far different from American society prior to 1960.

Today's teacher must be prepared to teach children from diverse ethnic, cultural and racial backgrounds. Woolever and Scott (1988) note that "children of different cultural groups may experience conflict between behavioral expectations in their homes and their cultural community and those of the classroom teacher" (p. 49). However, many critics think that multiculturalism will lead us into a culture of forbidden questions in which people feel they cannot raise certain questions or hold certain views without being labelled racist, sexist, or homophobic.

Point 2: Menand feels that new textbooks go out of their way to give all cultures equal prominence. He says that these books discourage our move toward assimilating into the majority culture. To think that America today has a "majority" culture, presumes that there is one group that is superior in our nation which should be considered "the culture" of which all others would wish to become a part. This view is incongruous with the reality of our American demographics today. One does not need to go very far to find inconsistencies in what is defined as the "majority culture". For example, in Miami, Florida prior to 1960 the "majority culture" was mostly White Anglo-American. The 1990 census indicates that Miami's population is predominantly Hispanic, and Black (African American and Haitian). If textbook companies would decide to follow such an example, of only representing the majority population, then they would be misrepresenting the majority culture of Miami if they were to emphasize the White Anglo-Americans in texts to be adopted by the Dade County Schools. Los Angeles is another

example where Asians, Hispanics and Blacks are the majority population.

Point 3: Menand says that we are now "more American" than ever before without defining clearly what an "American" is. The riots that occurred in Los Angeles in 1992 are not typical of the problems that America faced twenty years ago. The picture that is conjured up in the minds of many people, when we talk about American society in its classic sense is that of Whites, who drive Fords or Chevies, attend Protestant churches on Sunday; women who are housewives, and men who make all the decisions. These images are not the images of today and they will not be in the future. The children of today do not live a "classic" American society because it no longer exists. And those who still hold to these ideas are out of touch with the present realities.

Multicultural education does not advocate that some people should forget about their cultures in order that they may learn to become Americans. It cannot adhere to a "melting-pot" blend of physical and intellectual views whose goal is, as Menand (1992) defines it: "the general assimilation into the mainstream culture (p. 381) which he suggests is the way most new groups have adapted themselves to American life: an idea which is not an accurate description of our American culture.

Point 4: Menand claims that African-Americans have "resisted" assimilation into the majority culture is misleading in that the history of the American Black is one of racism, prejudice, discrimination and segregation. Although slavery was abolished after

the Civil War, it was not until the 1960's that Blacks felt empowered and began to take significant steps toward becoming economically and politically integrated into our society. And to use the term resistance, when the real issue is acceptance by Whites, is to suggest a very skewed perspective on the real issues.

Rhetoric and reforms to help Blacks assimilate into our society have met with resistance by both Blacks and Whites who realize that such steps can do more in the long-run to hinder progress toward acceptance and integration within the economic and political realm. Yet, these measures have had an impact in making non-Blacks sensitive to the hardships and difficulties imposed on Blacks through prejudice and racism. Several scholars, including Kozel (1992) have written extensively on the inequalities in American public schools.

The intent of education, including multicultural education, is to add more new knowledge into an existing, old knowledge: to enhance and expand our understanding through continual intellectual growth. Multiculturalists do not insist that western history, culture and knowledge should be neglected in favor of "minority-American" culture and history. The request is simple, that other cultures also be studied in our schools to help make us more aware that we are all part of one race: the human race.

The multiculturalist's movement which has been described as politically correct or P.C. is said to have launched a campus reign of terror against those who are conservative in their thinking and behavior. However, Willie (1991) and Ehnenreich (1991) see multi-

culturalism education as a tool to relieve the Whites in the United States of the burden of the notion of White supremacy. Many Whites need to be liberated from the sense of racial superiority and the need to always be the majority with its attending consequences: to take care of other people emotionally, financially, politically, and militarily. Ehrenreich (1991) accurately states that:

> *"...the beneficiaries of multiculturalism are not only the oppressed peoples of the standard P.C. lists (minorities and gays). The 'unenlightened' the victims of monoculturalism are oppressed too, or at least deprived. Our educations, whether at Yale or at State U were narrow and parochial and left us ill-equipped to navigate a society that truly is multicultural and is becoming more so everyday"* (p. 84).

Dr. Gustavo A. Mellander (1991) Chancellor, West Valley Mission Community College District believes that educators should return to basic educational values and a more fair representation of various cultures in the classroom where Global Education concepts are emphasized:

> *"We must do more to educate our students about other peoples points of views and cultures...We must be more open to contributions made by all peoples, races and genders... Many of these contributors have not been properly credited in the past. By reexamining each course,*

and keeping the global concept in mind, we are preparing students for a more realistic view of the world" (p 14).

Seligman (1990) concurs with Senator Paul Simon in his statement that Americans will need to know a foreign language to get along in the 21st century. He includes a quote from the Illinois senator:

"Cultural isolation (monoculturalism) is a luxury the United States can no longer afford" (p.37).

Point 5: Menand focuses on the debate over multicultural education as emphasizing teaching about African culture to the exclusion of all others. This is not an accurate view. The position of multicultural education encourages study of other cultures as an important part of a well rounded education. We should know all we can about all ancient civilizations, not only the Greeks and Romans. It is seldom that one is exposed to the study of Chinese civilization, yet their influence is far reaching and still has impact on human intellectual and political thought. Our move toward global economic interdependence is changing the direction of educational needs. Once we were safe as the "World Power", the omnipotent culture. We can no longer continue to reflect this ethnocentric view of America in our educational curriculum.

It is essential that we learn the histories of other cultures and the languages that enable us to interact with others, to provide a basis for maintaining a balance of power among all cultures and nations of the world. Even though English has become one of the major languages of communication in the world, we cannot assume that other people will totally give up their native languages and cultural values in the process of developing a global perspective. Such a move would rob the world of its richness and vitality: the very essence that has made America great.

In his discussion of whether the Egyptian nose is Caucasoid, or Negroid, Menand responds to the separatists who wish to isolate racial issues with respect to the great civilizations. Were the Egyptians Negroid or were they not is again a way to distort the issue of multicultural education and to create racial tensions. The likelihood that all the cultures on the African continent, before the colonists, were Black, is probable. However, what is the point?

Children studying about ancient civilizations should be able to draw their own conclusions based on information that is accurate and responsibly presented. The goal of developing a multicultural perspective in education is to present the issues as they are, according to the information available, rather than inserting prejudicial and emotional issues which only serve to feed the racial insecurities within our society. Prejudices are rooted in ignorance.

One of the primary intentions of multicultural education is to

enable students to assess the gap between democratic ideals and the American reality: to help students make sense of their place in a multicultural world. Economically and socially, multicultural education should help students learn the workings of diverse economic systems and the moral consequences of their own, their neighbors, and the nation's actions. Multicultural education is designed to help students understand global, ecological, ethical and value issues. It will help students, the future leaders in the "New World Order" to pursue fairness and responsibility in dealing with other members of the human race (Decter, 1991). It is true that we have come a long way in realizing the rights of other human beings and we have realized many of our misunderstandings about equality and equity. Our society of the early twentieth century was not concerned primarily with educational issues as it is today. In fact, most immigrants who came to our country during the industrial revolution, were sacrificed for two or three generations before education could become the family's focus.

It was during the sixties that America began to wake up to appreciate the importance of education and to realize the significance of equal and fair educational rights for all children. Those who understand this, also realize the absurdity of comparing past ethnic group experiences with those of today's. The role of education as it relates to the work force of the present and the future is at the heart of today's educational issues. Those who come to America today can no longer be satisfied with the prospect of sacrificing their children to ignorance and consequent struggle.

As a nation we are realizing that all people are important resources and that our changing technological era demands that we appreciate the need for a well educated, integrated work force.

Multicultural education is aimed at removing labels that have been plastered on people. Dent (1989) says that such labels set apart the African-American males as the most feared population which places them under tighter scrutiny in the schools. This interprets to mean African-American males have no place in the academic world. These labels teach children that Blacks are always wrong, that White children are more important than Black or Hispanic or Asian children, and that schools and teachers cannot be trusted. These labels set a people apart as "disadvantaged", needing handouts and crumbs from the majority people; a behavior that perpetuates a slavery mentality and destroys human dignity and personal integrity. These are the labels that classify a people as rapist, dangerous, paranoids, dope-smoking buffoons, and criminals.

Multicultural education is intended to remove all these labels so we can yet build a world in which everyone is able to contribute his or her fair share to society: a world where there will be no need of affirmative actions and quotas: a world where people are hired and fired based upon their abilities and not on the color of their skin or heritage: a world where no child should be afraid of school "haze", and the child can learn to achieve at his or her fullest potential. This will be a world where teachers are not afraid to discipline, or to correct, where high expectations of excellence (not perfection) apply to all children.

In conclusion, multiculturalism is not about Blacks and Whites. It's not about Blacks, Whites, Reds, and Yellow (more labels). Multiculturalism is about the human race. Green (1990) succinctly states:

> *"We have projected images of what we think an American is. These images are what keep us unfulfilled. If America is defined by only Whites, then it will be rejected. If it is defined only by Blacks, it will also be rejected. All of America - Black, White, Red and Yellow - must assist in developing an image of America that embraces the fullness of who we are as a nation."* (p 8).

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Biographical Information

Inez A. Heath, Ph. D. is an assistant professor in Social Studies in the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education at the University of West Florida. She also teaches courses in Multicultural Education and English as a Second Language.

Godfrey Franklin is an assistant professor in Psychological Foundations in the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education at the University of West Florida in Pensacola. He also teaches courses in multicultural education.